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THE IDEA OF ENVIRONMENT IN THOMAS
HARDY'S NOVELS

By

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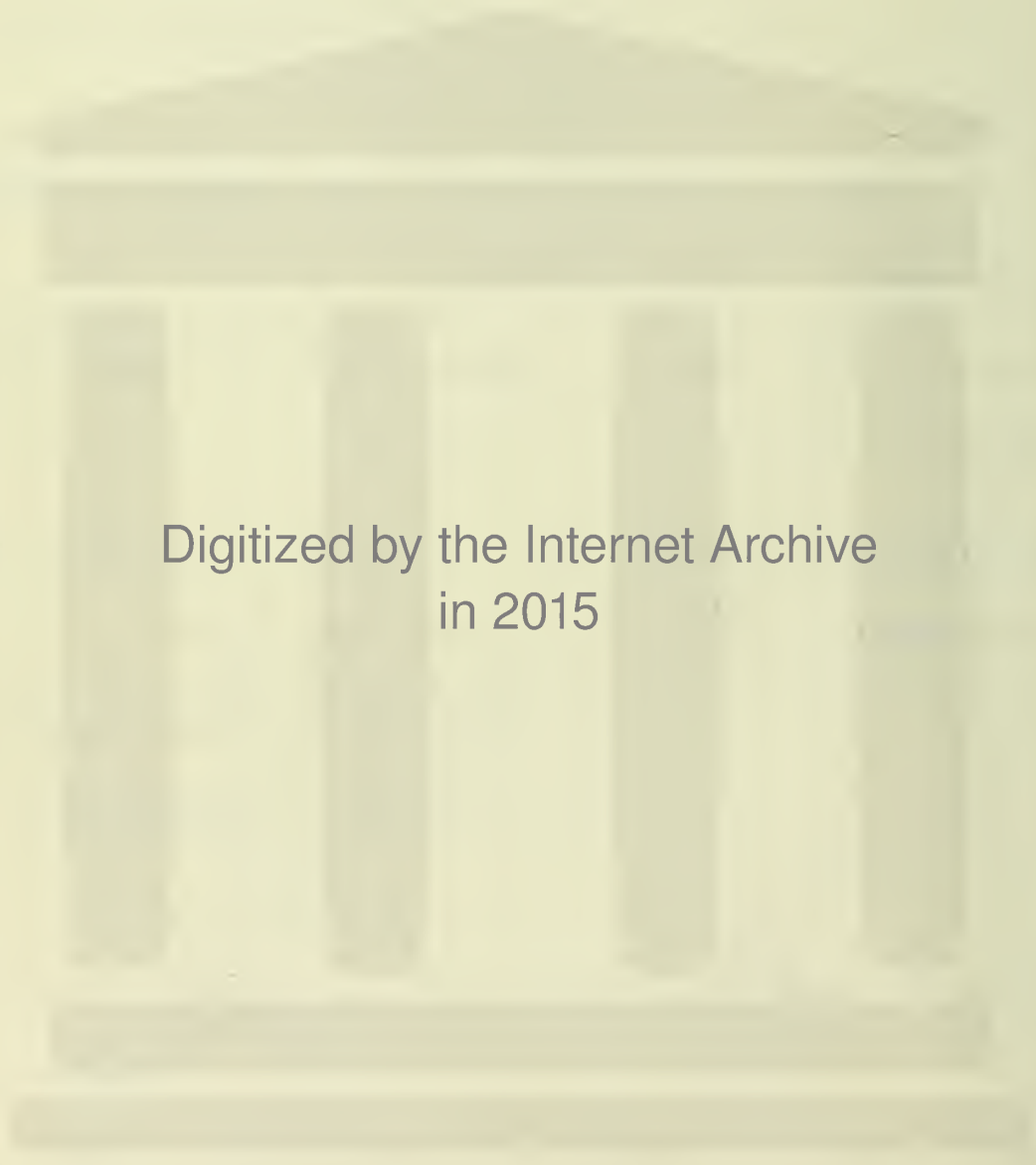
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THE IDEA OF ENVIRONMENT IN THOMAS HARDY'S NOVELS

INTRODUCTION

During the last half of the nineteenth century naturalism had an important place in English literature. It was perhaps the inevitable outcome of the reaction, which began with the Renaissance, against the medieval sovereignty of mere authority, and it found its greatest literary expression in the school of naturalistic novel writers. In philosophy naturalism was defined as a view of the world and of man's relation to it, in which only the operation of natural (as opposed to supernatural or spiritual) laws and forces is admitted. When it was introduced into literature in the eighteenth century, it was known as minute and extreme realism, accuracy in every detail, truth deprived of all theory. Later it was thought of as realism with certain theories of life obtained from nineteenth century biology. Darwin, in his theory of the development of the species, his ideas of evolution and survival of the fittest, showed man deprived of all supernatural supports. From this theory the naturalists took their basic conception of man: not a chosen spirit under divine guidance but a helpless prey of strong and sensual instincts, the product of his heredity and environment, tossed about aimlessly as a vessel is driven by a stormy sea.

In classical mythology Fate was a power above the gods, inexorable, omnipresent, overruling all affairs of men. Nineteenth century science defines Fate as an individual's heredity and environment, and not an unyielding power which is apart from everything and above God and man. These two external forces--heredity and environment--are viewed as either the maker or breaker of man.

The element of environment constitutes an important part in the naturalistic theory. In its common use it means all that lies outside the individual, whether it be landscapes, people, or social conventions. The environment of man is more extensive than that of any other animal, and its influence is naturally greater. In addition to chemical and physical stimuli, which are powerful factors in the development of all organisms, man is situated in a world of social and psychical stimuli which exert a tremendous influence on him. He is stimulated not only by his present environment but also by the remembrance of past experiences and the expectations of future ones.

It is especially in the naturalistic conception of environment--a determining factor in human fate--that Thomas Hardy joins this school of thought. As a boy he was very sensitive to his surroundings. When he wandered over the shaggy heath near his little home, or roamed through the dense woodlands of the Wessex country, listening to the water rush through the mighty weirs, or playing among the orchards and cornfields of the quiet dairy farms, in villages and larger towns, he noted

not only the beauties but also the struggle and rivalry of nature and animal life. He has watched the country of Wessex, with its natural beauty and grandeur, in every weather, and has noted its various moods; he has smiled with it in its joys and likewise shared its struggles. In truth, he has become the leading poet of the Wessex country.

Mr. Hardy is a passionate lover of nature. To Tennyson nature was a simple joy, a thing to be delighted in, to be learned by constant association. With Mr. Hardy it is this and more. He sees it as a thing to live with in closest intimacy, and thus he has made it more than a mere appropriate background for his novels. Nature is neither a landscape, on which the characters are drawn, nor a vague abstraction set apart from the plot, but a well defined, living personality, a vast, silent organism, which is a part not only of the substance of the story but an active participant in the struggles of humanity. He has seen the part really played by natural scenes in the daily life of the people around him, and thus his characters are literally children of the soil--rustics whose occupations are allied closely to nature, as woodlanders, dairy maids, shepherds, cottagers, and furze cutters. He has gone down among these unnoticed, forgotten sons of the earth and discovered in this average humanity, men whose lives are as mysteriously interesting and as spiritually adventurous as those of kings and queens. In this myriad of ordinary, everyday, nature-pervaded folk he

has affirmed and visualized again and again Carlyle's dream of the infinite shoe-black.

Nature or environment, and human nature in Mr. Hardy's novels are constantly acting and reacting on each other. At one time the mood and will of nature controls the mood and will of man and holds the human action in solution. Then again nature is overcome by the spirit of man and is held in check for a short time. There are two classes of environment interpreters. There are those who love their surroundings and ask no sympathy from it, but take the burdens which are laid upon them by nature with a happy heart. There are others who claim the right of sympathy from their environment, and if it is not forthcoming rebel against the circumstances and often invent a sympathy of their own. Mr. Hardy belongs to both classes, but in his novels the mood of nature predominates over the mood of man. The agnostics of the Victorian Age claimed nature had no purpose; Wordsworth believed in "nature's holy plan"; Thomas Hardy shows an actual relationship between nature and humanity. He sees environment as a material fate, a power to mould characters and to form destinies.

Professor Stuart P. Sherman in his Contemporary Literature says, "It appeared, in brief, to his vision that this blind power which moves through all things, though occasionally coinciding with human law, urges men on to the fulfilment of its own tendencies, irrespective of the disasters which may consequently befall them in that social order established and regulated



by reason and foresight. Because, however, he is fully aware of the resolute power perpetually conflicting with the incessant pressure of instinct, naturalism attains in him to tragedy."¹ To Mr. Hardy life is a hard and useless thing because of binding conventions and unendurable circumstances; it is unjoyful because of the unattained ambitions which are everywhere apparent. Of his attitude Professor Sherman writes, "In condemning the ways of God to man this grim artist seems obsessed by the idea that all nature is conspiring to bring a helpless humanity to degradation and shame."² Thus we see Mr. Hardy's idea of environment--a determining factor in human destiny, an active personal force in his novels, so closely allied with humanity that it moulds the lives and characters of the people who come in contact with it.

It is the purpose of this thesis to trace the idea of environment through Mr. Hardy's novels. I shall take up the novels chronologically, showing the first appearance of this idea, some different aspects of the subject which are introduced along the way, and trace the idea through to the end.

1 P. 167.

2 P. 270.

CHAPTER I.

NOVELS FROM 1871-1878

In 1871, Desperate Remedies, Mr. Hardy's first novel, was published anonymously. It is a study chiefly in plot containing mystery, intrigue, crime, melodramatic situation, startling coincidence, and moral obliquity; as a whole it shows the dominating influence of the novelist's predecessors and is not a foreshadowing of his later and better works.

The story is built up on the secret breach of the social code of morality by a young woman, who later found herself in a position which made the discovery of her secret dangerous. She introduced her unrecognized son into her employment and resolved to bring about a marriage between him and the daughter of a later, worthy and disappointed lover. This plan, joined in by the son, who had already a wife, led to deep plotting and finally to murder. Such a story shows the author's power to construct an elaborate plot, and to hold a sure grasp upon every strand of the entanglement throughout the novel, but it is more workmanlike than attractive and cannot be called a great novel.

However, in this early work Mr. Hardy's keen eye watches attentively nature and the kindred of the soil. From the beginning he is a nature painter of the rarest kind, and his sympathetic

interpretation is found in such a passage as this: "The water gurgled down from the old mill pond to a lower level, under the cloak of rank broad leaves--the sensuous natures of the vegetable world."¹ Here the novelist shows his idea of the sentient qualities in nature, the active personality of nature, and the perception in her of all possible moods and movements of the human consciousness. He displays the power of this silent nature in its effect upon the character of the heroine, Cytherea Graye. When Cytherea regained consciousness after the shock of her father's death Mr. Hardy writes, "Recollections of what had passed evolved itself an instant later, and just as they entered the door--through which another and sadder burden had been carried but a few instants before--her eyes caught sight of the south-western sky, and, without heeding, saw white sunlight shining in shaft-like lines from a rift in a slaty cloud. Emotions will attach themselves to scenes that are simultaneous--however foreign in essence these scenes may be--as chemical waters will crystallize on twigs and wires. Even after that time any mental agony brought less vividly to Cytherea's mind the scene from the Town Hall windows than sunlight streaming in shaft-like lines."² Mr. Hardy shows the effect of sounds upon Cytherea in this passage: "She was in the mood for sounds of every kind now, and strained her ears to catch the faintest, in wayward

1 Hardy, Desperate Remedies, p. 266.

2 Ibid., p. 11.

enmity to her quiet of mind..... The sound was a kind of intermittent whistle it seemed primarily: no, a creak, a metallic creak, ever and anon, like a plough, or a rusty wheel of some kind. Yes, it was, a wheel--the water-wheel in the shrubbery by the old manor-house, which the coachman had said would drive him mad.

"She determined not to think any more of these gloomy things; but now that she had once noticed the sound there was no sealing her ears to it. She could not help timing its creaks, and putting on a dread expectancy just before the end of each half-minute that brought them.....

"She shivered. Now she was determined to go to sleep; there could be nothing else left to be heard or to imagine--it was horrid that her imagination should be so restless. Yet just for an instant before going to sleep she would think this--suppose another sound should come--just suppose it should! Before the thought had well proceeded through her brain, a third sound came.

"The third was a very soft gurgle or rattle--of a strange and abnormal kind--yet a sound she had heard before at some past period of her life--when, she could not recollect. To make it the more disturbing, it seemed to be almost close to her--either close outside the window, close under the floor, or close above the ceiling. The accidental fact of its coming so immediately upon the heels of her supposition, told so powerfully upon her excited nerves that she jumped up in the bed..... The third, then was an unusual sound.

"It was not like water, it was not like wind; it was not the night-jar, it was not a clock, nor a rat, nor a person snoring.

"She crept under the clothes, and flung her arms tightly round Miss Aldcliffe, as if for protection."¹ Later in the book Mr. Hardy again shows the power of nature over Cytherea--"Heavy drops of rain, followed immediately by a forked flash of lightning and sharp rattling thunder compelled her, willingly or no, to accept his invitation. She ascended the steps, stood beside him just within the porch and for the first time obtained a series of short views of his person as they waited there in silence."² "At this moment, by reason of the narrowness of the porch, their dresses touched, and remained in contact..... The touch of clothes, which was nothing to Manston, sent a thrill through Cytherea, seeing, moreover, that he was of the nature of a mysterious stranger. She looked out again at the storm, but still felt him."³ "They went inside and Manston sat down at the organ and began playing.... Cytherea, in spite of herself, was frightened, not only at the weather, but at the general unearthly weirdness which seemed to surround her there. He now played more powerfully. Cytherea had never heard music in the completeness of full orchestral power, and the tones of the organ which reverberated with considerable

1 Ibid., pp. 102-104.

2 Ibid., p. 157.

3 Ibid., p. 158.

effect in the comparatively small space of the room, heightened by the elemental strife of light and sound outside, moved her to a degree out of proportion to the actual power of the mere notes, practiced as was the hand that produced them. The varying strains--now loud, now soft; simple, complicated, weird, touching, grand, boisterous, subdued; each phase distinct, yet modulating into the next with a graceful and easy flow--shook and bent her to themselves, as a gushing brook shakes and bends a shadow cast across its surface. The power of the music did not show itself so much by attracting her attention to the subject of the piece, as by taking up and developing as its libretto the poem of her own life and soul, shifting her deeds and intentions from the hands of her judgment and holding them in its own.

"She was swayed into emotional opinions concerning the strange man before her; new impulses of thought came with new harmonies, and entered into her with a gnawing thrill. A dreadful flash of lightning then, and the thunder close upon it. She found herself involuntarily shrinking up beside him and looking with parted lips at his face."¹ A few minutes later the storm decreased in violence. "Cytherea drew a long breath of relief, and prepared to go away. She was full of a distressing sense that her detention in the old manor-house, and the acquaintance-

1 Ibid., pp. 161-162.

ship it had set on foot, was not a thing she wished. It was such a foolish thing to have been excited and dragged into frankness by the wiles of a stranger.

"'Allow me to come with you,' he said..... His influence over her had vanished with the musical chords, and she turned her back upon him."¹ Finally Mr. Hardy shows the effect of natural surroundings on the heroine in this passage: "The stillness of this place oppressed and reduced her to mere passivity. The only wish the humidity of the place left in her was to stand motionless. The helpless flatness of the landscape gave her, as it gives all such temperaments, a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single entity under the sky."² These passages show distinctly the power nature exerted over Cytherea. Because of her inability to remain firm against external influences she was tossed to and fro by unexpected circumstances.

Thus Desperate Remedies is a study chiefly in plot and sensation. Even in this exciting and thrilling narrative Mr. Hardy stops in several places and draws beautiful nature passages, but nature has a subordinate place in the story compared with the following novels. In these passages he interprets the personal qualities of nature and shows how "white sunlight shining in

1 Ibid., p. 163.

2 Ibid., p. 266.

shaft-like lines from a rift in a slaty cloud," how the noise from an old mill wheel, how the flashes of lightning, and how music in the "completeness of full orchestral power," affected the heroine's nature and influenced her character. The author has clearly shown the power of this sentient nature over the individual but he does not characterize nature as deliberately planning "to bring all humanity to degradation and shame" as he does in his later works.

It is in Under the Greenwood Tree, the second novel, published anonymously in 1872, that Mr. Hardy's peculiar gifts are first introduced. This book is indeed the door through which one passes directly into the main body of the novelist's work, to see the full length of the building which stretches beyond. There is no melodramatic situation, no startling coincidence, no intricately constructed narrative in this novel as is found in Desperate Remedies. It may be regarded as a preliminary statement of the type of material and the kind of spirit, which are to be more extensively and elaborately used later. The story is of a rural courtship, spiced with intimate and kindly humor, very delicately and charmingly told; no profound psychology or hidden mysteries lurk in it. Although the scope of the novel is small and the texture somewhat slight, this pleasing rural story shows the true charm of a quaint and secluded part of England before it was oppressed by modern industrialism and had

yielded to the telegraph, railroad, and graded school, or had been finally submerged in the melting pot of the World War.

In Desperate Remedies, nature came into the plot only incidentally but in Under the Greenwood Tree the whole story is permeated by the rustic setting. The book opens with this passage: "To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amid its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall. And winter, which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves, does not destroy its individuality.

"On a cold starry Christmas-eve within living memory, a man was passing up a lane near Mellstock Cross, in the darkness of a plantation which whispered thus distinctively to his intelligence."¹ Here Mr. Hardy shows the sentient, personal qualities of nature which are found in his previous novel but not once does he specifically show the effect of nature upon the character of an individual. Twice he makes known that the persons are conscious of their narrow surroundings, but he does not show environment in the act of narrowing them. When Dick asked for Fancy Mr. Day replied, "D'ye think Fancy picked up her good manners, the smooth turn of her tongue, her musical

1 Under the Greenwood Tree, p. 3.

skill, and her knowledge of books, in a homely hole like this?"¹
Fancy in a letter of Mr. Maybold wrote, "It is my nature--perhaps all women's--to love refinement of mind and manners; but even more than this, to be ever fascinated with the idea of surroundings more elegant and luxurious than those which have been customary."²

Thus Under the Greenwood Tree is a lovely summer's story in which the youthful mood of the world is delicately reflected. The whole story is pervaded by the spirit of nature. The lives of this secluded folk are closely linked to their environment and with it they are joyful in their small rustic world. True, the surroundings have moulded their lives but only two persons are conscious of its narrowing power. There is no idea of nature asserting itself against the individual in an antagonistic manner. There is no revolting against its binding force but a calm happy acceptance of the environment. In this secluded spot the natives find love, peace, and happiness.

In A Pair of Blue Eyes of 1873, the first novel to bear Thomas Hardy's name, the tragic note of battle with inevitable environment is first struck with a deep sound. The story is based upon the love of a master and his pupil for a blue-eyed little girl, and the inevitable circumstances which

1 Ibid., p. 208.

2 Ibid., p. 244.

attend the heroine every step of the way. On the first page of the novel Mr. Hardy shows Elfride's environment and its effect upon her. In a large measure this statement may explain her tragic life: "She had lived all her life in retirement--the monstrari digito of idle men had not flattered her, at the age of nineteen or twenty she was no further on in social consciousness than an unborn young lady of fifteen."¹ Being brought up in this fashion, she naturally fell in love with the interesting young man who came from the city to her remote home. The idea of the child's environment springs forth again when this young man's mother said to him, "Living down in an outstep place like this, I am sure she ought to be very thankful that you took notice of her. She'd most likely have died an old maid if you hadn't turned up."² The novelist remarked, "The circumstances of her lonely and narrow life made it imperative that in trotting about the neighbourhood she must trot alone or else not at all."³ Even the new stepmother was struck by the childishness and inexperience of Elfride, caused by her natural environment. When she tried to write a book the new stepmother said to her, "Knowing nothing of the present age which everybody knows about, for safety you chose an age known

1 A Pair of Blue Eyes, p. 1.

2 Ibid., p. 105.

3 Ibid., p. 119.

neither to you nor other people."¹ Once again Mr. Hardy shows how Elfride's natural surroundings had impressed her. When she went to London with her stepmother and entered into society the author states, "Elfride could not but admire the beauty of her fellow country-men, especially since herself and her own few acquaintances had always been slightly sunburnt or marked on the back of the hands by a bramble-scratch at this time of the year."² Later when Knight and Elfride became engaged, he saw the effect of environment in making her small world and said, "To think that I should have discovered such an unseen flower down there in the West--to whom a man is as much as a multitude to some women, and a trip down the English Channel like a voyage around the world!"³ It was because of the unpleasantness of her surroundings that Elfride finally married Lord Luxellian. The servant said, "I may as well speak plainly, and tell you that her home was no home to her now. Her father was bitter to her and harsh upon her; though Mrs. Swancourt was well enough in her way, 'twas a sort of cold politeness that was not worth much and the little thing had a worrying time of it altogether."⁴

1 Ibid., p. 146.

2 Ibid., p. 162.

3 Ibid., p. 298.

4 Ibid., p. 452.

Thus we see that the cause of the tragedy in her life can be laid at the door of her natural environment.

Mr. Hardy displays the power of silent nature in its effect upon the character of Elfride. "She peered out as well as the window, beaded with drops, would allow her, and saw only the lamps, which had just been lit, blinking in the wet atmosphere and rows of hideous zinc chimney-pipes in dim relief against the sky. She writhed uneasily, as when a thought is swelling in the mind which must cause much pain at its deliverance in words... 'O Stephen,' she exclaimed, 'I am so miserable! I must go home again--I must--I must! Forgive my wretched vacillation. I don't like it here--nor myself--nor you!'"¹ Even a clouded sky affected Elfride's nature--"It was a cloudy afternoon. Elfride was often diverted from a purpose by a dull sky; and though she used to persuade herself that the weather was as fine as possible on the other side of the clouds, she could not bring about any practical result from this fancy. Now, her mood was such that the humid sky harmonized with it."² Again Mr. Hardy shows the sentient qualities of environment and its effect upon the heroine--"It is with cliffs and mountains as with persons; they have what is called a presence, which is not necessarily proportionate to their actual bulk. A little cliff will im-

1 Ibid., pp. 131-132.

2 Ibid., p. 240.

impress you powerfully; a great one not at all. It depends, as with man, upon the countenance of the cliff.

"'I cannot bear to look at that cliff,' said Elfride. 'It has a horrid personality, and makes me shudder. We will go.'"¹

For the first time in the novels of this period the author shows nature antagonistic to man. When Elfride left Knight in the perilous situation on the cliff Mr. Hardy remarks, "Knight could only look sternly at nature's treacherous attempt to put an end to him, and strive to thwart her."² "To those musing weather-beaten West-Country folk who pass the greater part of their days and nights out of doors, nature seems to have moods in other than a poetical sense; predilections for certain deeds at certain times, without any apparent law to govern or season to account for them. She is read as a person with a curious temper; as one who does not scatter kindnesses and cruelties alternately, impartially, and in order, but heartless severities or overwhelming generousities in lawless caprice. Man's case is always that of the prodigal's favorite or the miser's pensioner. In her unfriendly moments there seems a feline fun in her tricks, begotten by a foretaste of her pleasure

1 Ibid., p. 244.

2 Ibid., p. 252.

in swallowing the victim."¹ The power of nature over Knight is expressed in this passage: "The rain increased, and persecuted him with an exceptional persistency which he was moved to believe owed its cause to the fact that he was in such a wretched state already. An entirely new order of things could be observed in this introduction of rain upon the scene. It rained upward instead of down. The strong ascending air carried the rain-drops with it in its race up the escarpment, coming to him with such velocity that they stuck into his flesh like cold needles. Each drop was virtually a shaft, and it pierced him to his skin. The water-shafts seemed to lift him on their points; no downward rain ever had such a torturing effect. In a brief space he was drenched, except in two places. These were on the top of his shoulders and on the crown of his hat.

"The wind, though not intense in other situations, was strong here. It tugged at his coat and lifted it. We are mostly accustomed to look upon all opposition which is not animate, as that of the stolid, inexorable hand of indifference, which wears out the patience more than the strength. Here, at any rate, hostility did not assume that slow and sickening form. It was a cosmic agency, active, lashing, eager for conquest: determination; not an insensate standing in the way."²

1 Ibid., p. 254.

2 Ibid., pp. 254-255.

Thus A Pair of Blue Eyes is "a tragedy of the human will believing itself free yet ceaselessly tangled and thwarted by external forces."¹ Thomas Hardy shows a sweet, innocent, inexperienced child, secluded in a remote place, kept back from social advantages and a full knowledge of the world by her natural environment. Elfride became entangled in a net of circumstances from which she could not extricate herself, and in her innocence and inability to clear up a misunderstanding she was thought guilty by a man who had narrow social ideals. The novelist places the blame upon her environment and training. He says, "It is difficult to frame rules which shall apply to both sexes, and Elfride, an undeveloped girl, must, perhaps, hardly be laden with the moral responsibilities which attach to a man in like circumstances."² As in Desperate Remedies the clouds, the cliffs, and the rain affected the character of the heroine. For the first time Mr. Hardy shows nature planning to bring an individual to destruction. Environment plays a larger part in this novel than in the preceding ones. It moulds the life of the heroine but it does not definitely determine the outcome of the story.

The next year (1874) in which Thomas Hardy married and returned to his rural home he produced Far From the Madding

1 Chew, Thomas Hardy Poet and Novelist, p. 155.

2 A Pair of Blue Eyes, p. 313.

Crowd, which was at once hailed as a really great novel and which has endured the test of time. The main thread of the story is the love of three men of different stations in life and widely contrasting temperaments for one woman. Contrary to a great many of Mr. Hardy's novels the story ends in a way which is pleasing to all. It is truly a rural novel from beginning to end. In describing this rural environment the author says, "In comparison with cities, Weatherbury was immutable. The citizen's Then is the rustic's Now. In London, twenty or thirty years ago are old times; in Paris ten years, or five; in Weatherbury three or four score years were included in the mere present, and nothing less than a century set a mark on its face and tone. Five decades hardly modified the cut of a gaiter, the embroidery of a smock-frock, by the breadth of a hair. Ten generations failed to alter the turn of a single phrase. In these Wessex nooks the busy outsider's ancient times are only old; his old times are still new; his present is futurity."¹

The power of environment over an individual is seen in its shaping of Gabriel Oak's life. He was closely and willingly associated with the earth. "Being a man not without a frequent consciousness that there was some charm in this life he led, he stood still after looking at the sky as a useful

1 Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 167.

instrument, and regarded it in an appreciative spirit, as a work of art superlatively beautiful. For a moment he seemed impressed with the speaking loneliness of the scene, or rather with the complete abstraction from all its compass of the sights and sounds of man."¹ He was so closely connected with his environment that he knew all the habits and moods of nature. "In approaching the door, his toe kicked something which felt and sounded soft, leathery, and distended, like a boxing glove. It was a large toad humbly travelling across the path. Oak took it up, thinking it might be better to kill the creature to save it from pain; but finding it uninjured, he placed it again among the grass. He knew what this direct message from the Great Mother meant. And soon came another.

"When he struck a light indoors there appeared upon the table a thin glistening streak, as if a brush of varnish had been lightly dragged across it. Oak's eyes followed the serpentine sheen to the other side, where it led up to a huge brown garden-slug, which had come indoors to-night for reasons of its own. It was nature's second way of hinting to him that he was to prepare for foul weather..... Apparently there was to be a thunderstorm, and afterwards a cold continuous rain. The creeping things seemed to know all about the later rain, but little

1 Ibid., p. 13.

of the interpolated thunderstorm; whilst the sheep knew all about the thunderstorm and nothing of the later rain."¹

The tragedy is woven around Bathsheba Everdene and is dominated by her. She is the best representative of Mr. Hardy's belief in a woman's inability to press independently and steadily towards the goal she has placed before her. With all her determination to manage her estate for herself and her ambition to overcome the circumstances of her surroundings she was forced to depend upon Oak. When there was trouble in the sheep folk she found that she was dependent upon Oak to free her from a net of circumstances caused by her surroundings. Environment also affected her nature, "The fungi grew in all manner of positions from rotting leaves and tree stumps, some exhibiting to her listless gaze their clammy tops, others their oozing gills.... The hollow seemed a nursery of pestilences small and great, in the immediate neighbourhood of comfort and health, and Bathsheba arose with a tremor at the thought of having passed the night on the brink of so dismal a place."² Through the story Mr. Hardy shows the personal, sensuous qualities of nature. "Oak raised his head and listlessly surveyed the scene. By the outer margin of the pit was an oval pond, and over it hung the attenuated skeleton of a chrome-yellow moon, which had only a few days to

1 Ibid., pp. 285-286.

2 Ibid., p. 356.

last--the morning star dogging her on the right hand. The pool glittered like a dead man's eye, and as the world awoke a breeze blew, shaking and elongating its deflection of the moon without breaking it, and turning the image of the star to a phosphoric streak upon the water."¹ This picture is essentially descriptive yet it seems to be vitalized by almost human emotion.

Thus in Far From the Madding Crowd environment has moulded the life of the hero and affected the nature and actions of the heroine to a considerable degree. All nature--the woods, the stars, the vegetable world, the moors, and the sunsets are used as something more than mere backgrounds; Mr. Hardy has made them into personalities. Nowhere in the story is this strong, personal nature antagonistic to man as it is in the novels of the next period.

On the whole the four novels of this period show about the same degree and the same idea of environment. Desperate Remedies, although it is not pervaded by nature, shows nature affecting the character and actions of the heroine but it does not deliberately plan her destiny. Under the Greenwood Tree is permeated by nature. Environment has shaped the lives of the characters but only two persons are conscious of it. Nature is tacitly and happily accepted by all and it does not lead to tragedy. A Pair of Blue Eyes shows the power of nature in

1 Ibid., p. 41.

dwarfing a child's life and depriving her of a full knowledge of the world. The elements of nature affect her character and actions. For the first and only time in this period Mr. Hardy shows nature antagonistic to man and deliberately plotting to bring him to destruction. Far From the Madding Crowd shows the effect of environment on the character of the heroine in her useless efforts to be mistress of herself and her property. Environment has affected the hero in that he has willingly been immersed in the common life of the earth. On the whole these first four novels show the beautiful side of nature and leave out the harsher elements. They show environment affecting the individual in an incidental way and not as a force which definitely and permanently moulds characters and forms destinies, and plans "to bring all humanity to degradation and shame."

Mr. Hardy displayed rare judgment and wisdom in withholding his pessimistic philosophy of life from his novels until he had obtained attention from his literary contemporaries and had established his place as a novel writer of no small merit. Yet it is known that he held the naturalistic views of life, including the power of heredity and environment to determine the destiny of an individual, and had displayed it in poems of an earlier date. In 1866, five years before he wrote Desperate Remedies, his first novel, he published a little poem entitled To an Unborn Pauper Child which truly shows his idea of the helplessness of an individual in the power of environment. He

says:

"Breathe not, hid heart; cease silently
And though thy birth-hour beckons thee,
Sleep the long sleep:
The Doomsters heap
Travails and teens around us here,
And Time-wraiths turn our songsingings to fear.

II.

"Hark, how the peoples surge and sigh,
And laughters fail, and greetings die:
Hopes dwindle; yea,
Faiths waste away,
Affections and enthusiasms numb;
Thou canst not mend these things if thou dost come.

III.

"Had I the ere of wombed souls
Ere their terrestrial chart unrolls,
And thou wert free
To cease, or be
Then would I tell thee all I know,
And put it to thee: Wilt thou take Life so?

IV.

"Vain vow! No hint of mine may hence
To theeward fly; to thy locked sense
Explain none can
Life's pending plan:
Thou wilt thy ignorant entry make
Though skies spout fire and blood and nations quake.

V.

"Fain would I, dear, find some shut plot
Of earth's wide wold for thee, where not
One tear, one qualm,
Should break the calm.
But I am weak as thou and bare;
No man can change the common lot to rare.

VI.

"Must come and bide. And such are we--
Unreasoning, sanguine, visionary--
That I can hope
Health, love, friends, scope
In full for thee; can dream thou'lt find
Joys seldom yet attained by humankind!"¹

1 Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy, p. 102.

Mr. Cunliffe in English Literature During the Last Century says, "It would have astonished contemporary admirers of the rich humor and rural charm of Under the Greenwood Tree and Far From the Madding Crowd to know that such bitter thoughts were already lodged in the author's mind. He had taken rank as an idyllist, and an idyllist for many readers he remained long after the full scope of his intentions as a novelist was revealed."¹

This dark philosophy including the idea of environment expressed in this little poem--a powerful factor which is either the maker or breaker of man--is given free reign by Mr. Hardy in the novels of the next period.

1 P. 43.

CHAPTER II.

NOVELS FROM 1876-1891

The Return of the Native published in 1878 is declared by numerous critics to be Mr. Hardy's most nearly perfect work of art as well as his most profound and least prejudiced study of human nature. In spite of its admirable qualities it was not as well received as Far From the Madding Crowd and one critic even went so far as to say that it was decidedly inferior to anything Thomas Hardy had yet written. The thread of the story is the love entanglement between two women and three men. Two of these characters are in direct contrast with two others. The first two, Eustacia and Wildeve, are highly complex natures, impulsive, passionate, selfish, but not without some characteristics which in different circumstances might have been turned to good; they are at odds with life and in constant war with the conditions among which they are placed. The second two, Thomasin and Venn, are simple, steady and courageous; they are steeped in their surroundings and in harmony with them. The story is a tragedy of temperaments, a struggling of the young, the weak, the coarse against the old, the strong, the refined. Over all the characters broods the dark spirit of Egdon which embodies in poetic form the modern fates of Heredity and Environment.

The entire novel is pervaded by the spirit of the heath. The words "Egdon" and "heath" are used two hundred and fifty-five times during the story. "Egdon is not only the scene of the tale; it dominates the plot and determines the characters. It is sentient: it feels, it speaks, it slays. The book opens with an impressive introduction to this, the protagonist of the drama."¹ Mr. Hardy says, "It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature--neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face suggesting tragical possibilities."² "It was a face upon which time makes but little impression. Its sombre nature intensifies the sad hours of day and night, and is enigmatic, needing explanation. Exhaling darkness, it lies Titanic, in broodful anticipation of the crack of doom, and its haggard asceticism is friend only to the stormy visitations of the elements: it feels only as a light caress the tempest that wrenches its trees like bones in their sockets. It is changeless as the heavens or the sea, and moulded only by vast geologic fingers. The power of its infinite vegetable existence is

1 Duffin, Thomas Hardy, p. 57.

2 Return of the Native, p. 65.

hidden under the mask of an apparent death-like torpor. It barely heeds the changes of the seasons--only in mid-summer does it flame in crimson and scarlet; and no absolute hour of the day is reckoned by the dwellers on its monotonous surface; nor is it responsive to the pale beams of the watery moon.

"Without doubt it lives; Egdon has a colossal human existence. It is untamable, Ishmaelitish. At nightfall it wakes to a watchful intentness. It is vocal with a tone as weird as the sea's own; a worn whisper, dry and paper~~y~~, the ruins of song; a voice that varies with intelligent differentiation according to the character of the various parts of the heath--acoustic pictures are returned from the darkened scenery. It stubbornly asserts its privileges against cultivation, and drives back the despairing tillage from its barbaric soil. What response of awakening it gives to the oncoming of spring is feline in its stealthiness. To its best-loved child it renders chilly premonition at the approach of evil; and, the evil having fallen upon his soul, his anguish is met by the imperturbable countenance of the heath, which, having defied the cataclysmal onset of centuries, reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features the wildest turmoil of a single man!"¹ It is this Egdon, the environment which permeates the whole novel, that makes

1 Duffin, Thomas Hardy, pp. 57-58.

or mars the lives of the persons who dwell amid its purple heather.

To Eustacia Vye, the heroine, "the queen of night"¹ with "the pagan eyes full of nocturnal mysteries,"² the heath was a cruel taskmaster. She was ambitious, jealous, domineering, romantic by nature. Her stormy passion was to conquer and command, to have in all things no law but her own willful nature. To her the world was a gigantic deliberate conspiracy, consciously plotting and inventing devices for her ruin; to her, nature was tragic, and it was necessary that she be the center of her universe. Mr. Hardy says, "Eustacia Vye was the raw material of divinity. On Olympus she would have done well with a little preparation. She had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is, those which make not quite a model woman. Had it been possible for the earth and mankind to be entirely in her grasp for a while, had she handled the distaff, the spindle and the shears at her own free will, few in the world would have noticed the change of government. There would have been the same equality of lot, the same heaping up of favors here, of contumely there, the same generosity before justice, the same perpetual dilemmas, the same captious alternations of caresses and blows that we endure now."³

1 Return of the Native, p. 65.

2 Ibid., p. 66.

3 Ibid., p. 65.

"Why did a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath? Budmouth was her native place, a fashionable seaside resort at that date."¹ After her parents' death she was left in care of her grandfather and went to live at his home on the heath. "She hated the change; she felt like one banished; but here she was forced to abide."² Her "celestial imperiousness, love, wrath, and fervor had proved to be somewhat thrown away on netherward Egdon. Her power was limited, and the consciousness of this limitation had biassed her development. Egdon was her hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and externally unreconciled thereto."³

This imperial recluse was eager for gay and brilliant life of cities, longing to escape from the binding influences of the lonely heath. "Thus it happened that in Eustacia's brain were juxtaposed the strangest assortment of ideas, from old time and from new. There was no middle distance in her perspective: romantic recollections of sunny afternoons on an esplanade, with military bands, officers, and gallants around, stood like gilded letters upon the dark tablet of surrounding Egdon. Every bizarre effect that could result from the random intertwining of watering-place glitter with the grand solemnity of a heath, was to be found

1 Ibid., p. 67.

2 Ibid., p. 68.

3 Ibid., p. 67.

in her. Seeing nothing of human life now she imagined all the more of what she had seen."¹ "Among other things opportunities had of late years been denied her of learning to be undignified, for she lived lonely. Isolation on a heath renders vulgarity well-nigh impossible. It would have been as easy for the heath-ponies, bats, and snakes to be vulgar as for her. A narrow life in Budmouth might have completely demeaned her."² "To be loved to madness--such was her desire..... Her prayer was always spontaneous and often ran thus: O deliver my heart from this fearful gloom and loneliness; send me great love from somewhere, else I shall die."³ Upon this state of affairs Mr. Hardy remarks, "Such views of life were to some extent the natural be- gettings of her situation upon her nature. To dwell on a heath without studying its meaning was like welding a foreigner without learning his tongue. The subtle beauties of the heath were lost to Eustacia; she only caught its vapors. An environment which would have made a contented woman a poet, a suffering woman a devotee, a pious woman a palmist, even a giddy woman thoughtful, made a rebellious woman saturnine."⁴

So it was that Eustacia openly rebelled against her

1 Ibid., p. 68.

2 Ibid., p. 68.

3 Ibid., p. 69.

4 Ibid., p. 70.

life among the wastes of Egdon hills. Fascinated by her dream of a great romantic love, this lonely, passionate spirit "filled up the spare hours of her existence by idealizing Wildeve for want of a better object. This was the sole reason for his ascendancy; she knew it herself. At moments her pride rebelled against her passion for him, and she even had longed to be free. But there was only one circumstance which could dislodge him, and that was the advent of a greater man."¹ Upon one occasion Wildeve said to her, "'You hate the heath as much as ever; that I know.' 'I do,' she murmured deeply. 'Tis my cross, my misery and will be my death!'"² "Oh, if I could live in a gay town as a lady should and go my own way and do my own doings, I'd give the wrinkled half of my life."³ Wildeve urged her to leave with him but he was not sufficient to satisfy her craving nature. "I want to get away from hereat almost any cost," she said with weariness, "but I don't like to go with you."⁴

Upon the arrival of Clym, she immediately rejected her old lover for a man "whom might possibly have the power to deliver her soul from a most deadly oppression,"⁵ and show her all the gayety of cities. Clym himself realized "that she loved him

1 Ibid., p. 71.

2 Ibid., p. 85.

3 Ibid., p. 93.

4 Ibid., p. 101.

5 Ibid., p. 132.

rather as a visitant from a gay world to which she rightly belonged than as a man with a purpose opposed to that recent past."¹ Her "dream had always been that, once married to Clym, she would have the power of inducing him to return to Paris,"² but he remained firm in his philanthropic intentions and Eustacia in despair found herself outside that whirl of pleasure of her dreams. Not only was her impatient demand for life unsatisfied, but Mrs. Yeobright aligned herself with the unjust, "colossal Prince of the World, who had framed her situation and ruled her lot."³ When Clym not only refused to take her away from the wilderness where "the world seemed all wrong," but denounced her as his mother's murderess, and unfaithful to him, "her state seemed so hopeless that she could play with it..... Eustacia could now observe herself as a disinterested spectator and think what a sport for Heaven this woman Eustacia was."⁴ And ever attentive and distant in the background of her misery was the "unchanging, immemorial heath, whose grandeur reduced to insignificance by its seamed and antique features, the wildest turmoil of a single man."⁵ Mocking her with her own futility and powerlessness, it is not surprising that the heath at last drove her to seek that

1 Ibid., p. 203.

2 Ibid., p. 242.

3 Ibid., p. 300.

4 Ibid., p. 344.

5 Ibid., p. 8.

"eternal rigidity" which at last gave to her beauty "an artistically happy background."¹

In marked contrast to the heath's effect on Eustacia was its effect on Clym Yeobright. He was indeed the product of Egdon, he knew and loved it and for him strength, "friendliness and geniality"² were written in the face of the shaggy hills. "Clym had been so inwoven with the heath in his boyhood that hardly anybody could look upon it without thinking of him."³ "He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odors. His eyes had first opened thereon; with its appearance all the first images of his memory were mingled; his estimate of life had been colored by it; his toys had been the flint knives and arrow-heads which he found there, wondering why stones should 'grow' to such odd shapes; by flowers, the purple bells and yellow gorse; his animal kingdom, the snakes and croppers; his society, its human haunters. Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye toward the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym."⁴ It was for him the place where he could "be a trifle less useless than anywhere else."⁵ The "untameable, Ishmaelitish thing to which civilization was an eternal enemy"⁶

1 Ibid., p. 381.

2 Ibid., p. 107.

3 Ibid., p. 170.

4 Ibid., pp. 176-178.

5 Ibid., p. 172.

6 Ibid., p. 6.

only inspired him to do some worthy thing--to be "a schoolmaster to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else would."¹ The oppressive horizontality of the heath made him feel equal with and not superior to any living creature under the sun. He admired and wished to ennoble the stupid laborers whom Eustacia hated. In the furze cutting she despised, her husband saw only "outdoor exercise which will do me good."² Even in the sorrow that came partially as a result of Clym's refusal to leave the hills, they seemed to strengthen and soothe him. The heath absorbed him into its furze and he became an indistinguishable part of Egdon. Indeed, in the end, he was not altogether unhappy "in the career of an itinerant open air preacher and lecturer on morally unimpeachable subjects."³ Although Eustacia was dead, Clym had his memories--and about him still lay the hills where he "would rather live than anywhere else in the world."⁴

If Clym Yeobright was the child of Egdon, Diggory Venn, the riddleman was its spirit. He rose unexpectedly from the heath and moved silently and mysteriously across the vast abode of gloom; omnipresent and always interested, he watched over the destinies of the different people of the drama. He knew the heath and constantly used it in his battle with Wildevæ. When

1 Ibid., p. 177.

2 Ibid., p. 253.

3 Ibid., p. 412.

4 Ibid., p. 188.

he first suspected the secret meetings of Eustacia and Wildeve he hid on Egdon while "near him, as in divers places about the heath, were areas strewn with large turves, which lay edgeways and upside down awaiting removal. He took two of these as he lay and dragged them over him till one covered his head and shoulders, the other his back and legs."¹ When he thought Wildeve was untrue to Thomasin he hurried to her. "Stretching out his long legs he crossed the pathless portion of the heath. Only a man accustomed to nocturnal rambles could at this hour have descended those shaggy slopes with Venn's velocity without falling headlong into a pit or snapping off his legs by jamming his foot into some rabbit-burrow. But Venn went without much inconvenience to himself."² Again he made use of the heath and its products when he obtained the money from Wildeve on Egdon by means of light of its glowworms.

To Thomasin Yeobright Egdon was no cross but a broad, impersonal setting. She had been born on the heath, reared in association with its hues and Egdon was the scope of her world. She was not conscious of its barrenness and its dwarfing powers. The heath produced no terrible fears in her soul and she accepted it with a calm, tacit serenity.

1 Ibid., p. 81.

2 Ibid., p. 268.

The effect of Egdon upon Damon Wildeve was almost as great as it was upon Eustacia. "He was brought up to better things than keeping the Quiet Woman. An engineer--that's what the man was as we know; but he threw away his chance, and so 'a took a public-house to live. His learning was no use to him at all."¹ He longed to take Eustacia and flee from the crushing power of their cruel taskmaster. Like Eustacia this spirit of unrest, of dissatisfaction and revolt against his surroundings was born in him, "to be yearning for the difficult, to be weary of that offered; to care for the remote, to dislike the near; it was Wildeve's nature always. This is the true mark of the man of sentiment. Though Wildeve's fevered feeling had not been elaborated to real poetical compass, it was of the standard sort. He might have been called the Rousseau of Egdon."²

Thus The Return of the Native is a study in the idea of environment--environment which moulds the lives of the people who come in contact with it, which crushes its greatest enemy, civilization, with its austere, celibate, heedless oppression. It is a tragedy of revolt of human nature against indomitable surroundings. Contrary to the novels of the first period, The Return of the Native shows nature antagonistic to the persons who refuse to be moulded by its power. To one whose love was akin to the cold, passionless sea, the clear, perfect stars, the

1 Ibid., p. 21.

2 Ibid., p. 217.

windy sky, Egdon would have been a paradise on earth, an ideal home, and a constant inspiration. But to Eustacia who sought an outlet for the smouldering passionate fires of her soul, it was a hell of mere nothingness, a solitude filled with oppression and restraint. She was a dreamer of dreams and in love with the imaginary phantasms of a heroic love. In direct contrast with her ideals, she was surrounded by the miserable wastes of Egdon, the stupid inhabitants, the maddening unworldliness of the wilderness. She had lived in Weymouth in her childhood days. "Just as that respectable place was to her a modern Paris and an ancient Rome, so Damon Wildeve was a very prince of romance; a trivial fellow of decent looks and a little education. Rejecting him for Clym Yeobright, she takes Clym for a born leader of men, who will go with her into all the brilliance of all the world; she finds him bent upon plain living and high thinking, and is in despair, desolate and famished, outside the whirl of pleasures, triumphs, joys. Her pitiful standards of greatness, pitiful ignorance of life, pitiful hunger of heart not wholly vulgar nor absurd, yet in a large measure both, make her a masterpiece."¹ It cannot be said that her character is explained by her heredity and circumstances; on the contrary, it is in the clash between her nature and her surroundings that gives her personality and fate significance. Damon Wildeve, a man of sharp intellect, refined

1 Johnson, Art of Thomas Hardy, p. 211.

manners, strong passions, suffered with Eustacia the dwarfing destructive wastes of Egdon. Clym, Thomasin, and Venn found beauty, joy, contentment in the barren heath. Because they were willingly immersed into its purple heather and moulded by its power they were allowed to remain among its shaggy hills. On the other hand, Eustacia and Wildene, the only two who rebelled against the heath, were the only two who met death through its agency.

"In The Return of the Native Hardy gives not only the life of Egdon Heath at a particular point of time--between 1840 and 1850; he shows us how its sombre wildness defies the revolutionary hand of man and reduces all his efforts to its own unchangeableness. Eustacia's passion and Wildene's frivolity, Clym Yeobright's high aspirations and his mother's deep affection, Thomasin's quiet faith and Diggory's sturdy devotion, the humbler efforts of their simple neighbors come to an end and disappear. Egdon Heath remains, not merely the same as when Hardy first saw it, more than a half century ago, but the same as when, in the far back ages, the first creature worthy of the name of man clawed its grim bosom in search of plants or wild berries."¹

In 1886 Mr. Hardy published The Mayor of Casterbridge which, because of its logical development, reserved strength, remorseless logic and artistic restraint, is regarded by many admirers as the author's masterpiece. It is in name and in

1 Cuncliffe, Introduction to The Return of the Native, p. 16.

fact the story of a man of character; it is also the record of his hopeless failure and defeat. Michael Henchard the man, was a hay-trusser, who sold his wife when he was drunk. After realizing what he had done, he repented and reformed, vowing not to touch intoxicants for twenty years. By great energy and determination he accumulated a small fortune and became the Mayor of Casterbridge, a respected and respectable man. When his wife and supposed daughter returned he found love and peace. But later little by little he was stripped of all things he had labored for during twenty years. Position, money, respect, and love soon left him. He sank lower and lower, until more miserable than he had ever been he died alone in a mud hut on the border of Egdon Heath.

The tragedy of Henchard's life is not found in the combination of external forces plotting against him as is found in The Return of the Native. His natural environment was not his fate, as Egdon Heath was Eustacia Vye's. His character was his fate. His shrewd, proud, forceful, stubborn, passionate nature dashed itself to pieces against its own qualities. Here Mr. Hardy shows that character is simply one of the numerous circumstances in an individual's environment; it is of such a distinct and unique nature that it automatically modifies all the other circumstances; it changes and affects them in a degree and manner peculiar to itself, so that the two persons whose outward circumstances are exactly similar would each have an environment different in every respect from that of the other. It is in

this sense that the novelist means "Character is Fate" as he quotes from Novalis. Character alone does not determine a man's destiny, but it profoundly modifies all the other determining factors. Henchard's character played the overmastering part, softened by human frailty and instability, that the heath did in The Return of the Native. He was made by nature to be the dominant feature and obstacle in his own and his associates' views and his biographer makes clear that fact.

The power of natural environment is also seen in several places during the story. In the description of Elizabeth-Jane early in the story Mr. Hardy says, "She possibly might never be fully handsome unless the carking accidents of her daily existence could be evaded before the mobile parts of her countenance had settled to their final mould.

"The sight of the girl made her mother sad--not vaguely but by logical inference. They both were still in that strait-waistcoat of poverty from which she had tried so many times to be delivered for the girl's sake. The woman had long perceived how zealously and constantly the young mind of her companion was struggling for enlargement, and yet now in her eighteenth year, it still remained but little unfolded. The desire--sober and repressed--of Elizabeth-Jane's heart was indeed to see, to hear, and to understand. How could she become a woman of wider knowledge, higher repute--"better", as she termed it--that was her constant inquiry of her mother. She sought further into things than other girls in her position ever did, and her mother groaned

as she felt she could not aid in the search."¹ When Elizabeth-Jane had lived a while in Henchard's home her environment quickly affected her nature. "The freedom she experienced, the indulgence with which she was treated, went beyond her expectations. The reposeful, easy, affluent life to which her mother's marriage had introduced her was, in truth, the beginning of a great change in Elizabeth..... With peace of mind came development, and with development beauty..... Like all people who have known rough times, light-heartedness seemed to her too irrational and inconsequent to be indulged in except as a reckless dram now and then; for she had been too early habituated to anxious reasoning to drop the habit suddenly."²

Mr. Hardy also shows that environment affects the actions and nature of an individual. "Darkness makes people truthful."³ "The exaggeration which darkness imparted to the glooms of this region impressed Henchard more than he had expected. The lugubrious harmony of the spot with his domestic situation was too perfect for him, impatient of effects, scenes, and adumbrations. It reduced his heart burning to melancholy and he exclaimed, 'Why the deuce did I come here!'"⁴ Again the novelist shows the power of external forces over Henchard. "If he could have summoned

1 The Mayor of Casterbridge, p. 29.

2 Ibid., pp. 103-104.

3 Ibid., p. 131.

4 Ibid., p. 152.

music to his aid, his existence might even now have been borne; for with Henchard music was of regal power. The merest trumpet or organ tone was enough to move him, and high harmonies transubstantiated him. But fate had ordained that he should be unable to call up this Divine spirit in his need."¹

Thus in The Mayor of Casterbridge the power of natural environment over the character of Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane is only incidentally seen. The processes of nature, which are so distinctly and vividly, and with such obvious symbolic meaning immersed into the substance of Far From the Madding Crowd and The Return of the Native, are barely present in The Mayor of Casterbridge. They are not needed--Henchard himself takes their place. He "provides the two main elements which combine to produce tragedy. In the rest of Hardy's fiction, these tragic elements are on the whole, separately provided, by personality and by the circumstances which have hold of personality. But the elemental antinomy, which is the basis of Hardy's tragedy is entirely Henchard's own; the antinomy of the ruthless driving forward of the main unappointed force of being, against the vitality which has become formulated into an organism of conscious desire. Henchard's conscious aspirations are undone by the impetuous stream of unconscious vigor which his own being provides.

1 Ibid., p. 358.

and fatally provides. So he himself appears as the symbolic counterpart of the whole tragic substance of the other dramatic novels. There, that substance is chiefly compounded of inner and outer forces; though certainly the outer impersonal force has always a strong alliance in that impersonal region which surrounds the consciousness of every human creature, and yet is included in individual existence. But in Henchard, human nature's dualism of personal and impersonal force is so intensified that his whole circumstance, as far as it is injurious to him, seems but the objectification of his own self injuring nature."¹ Instead of natural environment conspiring to bring a helpless individual to destruction, the story shows character, one of the circumstances of man's environment, dashing itself to pieces against its own qualities. To the quotation in King Lear,

"As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,
They kill us off for their sport--"

the defeated Henchard would have replied from the same tragedy

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us."

The Woodlanders, published in 1887, is in many respects similar to The Return of the Native, and one is tempted to believe that its conception if not its composition preceded The Mayor of Casterbridge. The story is built around the devotion of Marty

1 Abercrombie, Thomas Hardy, pp. 125-126.

South for Giles Winterborne, two products of the soil, and Giles' devotion to Grace Melbury, a girl above her surroundings, who is wooed and won by a doctor, Edred Fitzpiers, and he in turn is wiled away by a wealthy widow, Felice Charmond. After the death of Winterborne and the falling off of the charm of Felice, Grace and Fitzpiers re-woo and the story ends happily.

As the heath was the background and moulded the characters in The Return of the Native, so the woodland in The Woodlanders occupies the same place; though its dominance is more kindly than the heath, it is scarcely less masterful. The peasants are permeated by the subtle influence of the surrounding woods.

Marty South can be compared readily with Thomasin Yeobright. She was born in the woodlands and from constant association with nature had a delicate apprehension of it. She noticed that the young pines began to sigh as soon as they were held upright: "they sigh because they are very sorry to begin life in earnest."¹ She was ignorant and uncouth, reared in poverty, and her "face had the usual fulness of expression which is developed by a life of solitude."² Her environment had placed sorrow and bitter hard work upon her, but the sweetness of her character and the iron endurance of her spirit were not crushed by such

1 The Woodlanders, p. 64.

2 Ibid., p. 9.

things. She knew that pain would be the result of such a love as hers, yet she never tried to escape it; whatever came or went, her unchangeable love was her own. The tragedy is much more subdued than in The Return of the Native, but the book ends with the keenest pathos and sweetest sorrow in Marty's lament over Giles' grave: "If ever I forget your name, I never can forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did good things!"¹ She is by far the greatest and noblest example of simple-natured womanhood found in Mr. Hardy's pages.

Marty South's father shows strongly the effect of environment upon him. His life was strongly linked to the life of the woodland tree. He exclaimed, "And the tree will do it--that tree will soon be the death of me."² "I could bear up, I know I could, if it were not for the tree--yes, the tree; 'tis that's killing me; there he stands, threatening my life every minute that the wind do blow. He'll come down upon us and squat us dead."³ "Ah, when it was quite a small tree, and I was a little boy, I thought one day of chopping it off with my hook to make a clothes-line prop with. But I put off doing it and then I again thought that I would; but I forgot it, and didn't. At last it got too big and now 'tis my enemy, and will be the death of me.

1 Ibid., p. 364.

2 Ibid., p. 13.

3 Ibid., p. 91.

Little did I think, when I let that sapling stay, that a time would come when it would torment me and dash me into my grave."¹

The doctor ordered the tree cut down, and when South noted its absence he exclaimed, "Oh, it is gone!--where?--where?....."

"His whole system seemed paralyzed with amazement. He lingered through the day and died that evening as the sun went down."²

There is a similarity in the characters of Giles Winterborne and Diggory Venn just as there is in Thomasin and Marty. Venn was the spirit of Egdon Heath and Winterborne was the spirit of the woodland. He moved silently through the groves, half disappearing among the swaying tree-stems, half-undistinguishable from the movement and sound of rustling leaves and the weird interweaving of the shadows. He loved Grace, who was above him intellectually and socially, with a pure, passionate love. He was so steadfast in love that his personal disappointment could not be compared with the welfare of Grace. He readily and gladly exposed himself, which brought on his death, in order to save his beloved's reputation.

Grace Melbury, the heroine, like Clym Yeobright had been raised above her surroundings by education and social advantages in a distant city; like him this implicated her in tragedy; like

1 Ibid., p. 92.

2 Ibid., p. 104.

him she became subdued again to her native environment; unlike him, in the closing chapters of the book she turned back to the outer world.

When she returned from the city to her home her father feared the influence which the surrounding woods would exert on her. "We, living here alone, don't notice how the whitey-brown creeps out of the earth over us; but she, fresh from the city--why, she'll notice everything."¹ He realized that the whitey-brown did creep over him and not only over his clothes and skin, but into his mind and spirit. He noticed that as she stood beside him "her modern attire looked almost odd where everything else was old-fashioned, and throwing over the familiar garniture of the trees a homeliness that seemed to demand improvement by the addition of a few contemporary novelties also."² Again he said, "I know Grace will gradually sink down to our level again, and catch our manners and way of speaking, and feel a drowsy content in being Giles' wife. But I can't bear the thought of dragging down to that old level as promising a piece of maidenhood as ever lived--fit to ornament a palace wi'--that I've taken so much trouble to lift up. Fancy her white hands getting redder every day and her tongue losing its pretty up-country curl in talking, and her bounding walk becoming the regular Hintock shail

1 Ibid., p. 32.

2 Ibid., p. 54.

and wamble."¹ In spite of her father's efforts she was subdued by her native environment. It was by means of Fitzpiers that she finally got back to the outer world.

Felice Charmond is less elaborately drawn than Eustacia Vye, less romantic, more hardened, more worldly, and even more misplaced in the forest than was Eustacia on the heath. Social conventions as well as the woodlands asserted themselves against her. She was a selfish, self-pitying woman who became "dreadfully nervous sometimes, living in such an outlandish place."² "Hintock has the curious effect of bottling up the emotions 'till one can no longer hold them; I am often obliged to fly away and discharge my sentiments somewhere, or I should die outright."³ She complained against the "terrible insitencies of society" and the "correctives and regulations pretendedly framed that society may tend to perfection" and asserted "the misery of country life is that your neighbors have no toleration for difference of opinion and habit. My neighbors think I am an atheist, except those who think I am a Roman Catholic; and when I speak disrespectfully of the weather or the crops they think I am a blasphemer."⁴

The natural environment affected Fitzpier's life in a

1 Ibid., p. 80.

2 Ibid., p. 61.

3 Ibid., p. 189.

4 Ibid., p. 189.

similar manner. On one occasion he said, "'Gammer Oliver, I've been here three months and although there are a good many people in the Hintocks and the villages round, and a scattered practice is often a very good one, I don't seem to get many patients. And there's no society at all; and I'm pretty near melancholy mad..... I should be quite if it were not for my books, and my lab--laboratory, and what not. Gammer, I was made for higher things.'"¹ "But whether he meditated the Muses or the philosophers, the loneliness of Hintock life was beginning to tell upon his impressionable nature. Winter in a solitary house in the country, without society, is tolerable, nay, even enjoyable and delightful, given certain conditions, but these are not the conditions which attain to the life of a professional man who drops down into such a place by mere accident."²

Thus The Woodlanders is full of a profound penetration of humanity by nature--nature which is objective and moulds characters. The lives of Giles Winterborne and Marty South are willingly immersed in the common life of the earth. Marty's father's life was ~~strongly~~ joined to the life of the woodland tree which he constantly feared, but he was not able to survive it. Grace Melbury, educated above her surroundings, and in spite of her father's efforts and worries, came under the woodland's

1 Ibid., p. 49.

2 Ibid., p. 123.

influence again. Felice Charmond and Edred Fitzpiers uselessly rebelled against social conventions as well as their natural environment. As the heath was victorious in The Return of the Native, so the woodland is victorious in The Woodlanders.

In summing up the ideas of environment in the three novels of this period we see in The Return of the Native and in The Woodlanders exactly the same aspect. Both novels are permeated and dominated by a natural environment--an active personal force which moulds characters and forms destinies. The people who revolt against their environment are shaped just as strongly as the persons who readily accept it. Environment is always the conqueror in the struggle for supremacy. In The Mayor of Casterbridge nature plays a minor part in the story compared with the other novels of this period. Character becomes one of the circumstances of environment, and instead of a natural surrounding antagonistic to the individual, character becomes antagonistic, and the whole tragedy is but the objectification of the Mayor's own self-injuring nature. On the whole we may say the idea of environment in the novels of this period is a personal, sensuous surrounding, antagonistic to man, conspiring to bring a helpless humanity to destruction.

CHAPTER III.

NOVELS FROM 1891-1898.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles, probably the most widely read of all of Thomas Hardy's books, was published in 1891. The author follows in the footsteps of various Victorian novelists, who have shown a calamity as old as human nature, yet the novel is told with almost unequalled tender and sympathetic sincerity. In this story of "a pure woman faithfully presented" Mr. Hardy "is obsessed by the idea that all Nature is conspiring to bring helpless" Tess to degradation and shame.

The natural surroundings in which Tess was born and reared made the catastrophe of her life not only possible but inevitable. In the account of the Durbeyfield family the author says: "All these young souls were passengers in the Durbeyfield ship--entirely dependent on the judgments of the two Durbeyfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, their health, even their existence. If the heads of the Durbeyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were these half-dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them--six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield. Some

people would like to know whence the poet whose philosophy is in these days deemed as profound and trustworthy as his song is sweet and pure, gets his authority for speaking of 'Nature's holy plan.'"¹

Because of the wretchedness of her home environment Tess went to the D'Urberville estate hoping there to rise above the restricting circumstances of her youth. But nature had planned differently. She met Alec D'Urberville and in her association with him "she was more pliable under his hand than a mere companionship would have made her, owing to her inevitable dependence upon his mother, and, through her comparative helplessness, upon him."² Through the conspiracy of nature Tess was brought unheeding to The Chase. "She was silent, and the horse ambled along for a considerable distance, till a faint luminous fog, which had hung in the hollow all the evening, became general and enveloped them. It seemed to hold the moonlight in suspension, rendering it more pervasive than in clear air. Whether on this account, or from absent-mindedness, or from sleepiness, she did not perceive that they had long ago passed the point at which the lane to Trantridge branched from the highway, and that her conductor had not taken the Trantridge track."³

"As Tess lay asleep in The Chase darkness and silence

1 Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 21.

2 Ibid., p. 66.

3 Ibid., p. 75.

ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and around them the hopping rabbits and hares. But where was Tess' guardian angel? Where was the Providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was on a journey, or peradventure he was sleeping and was not to be awaked."¹ While her guardian angel was away all nature urged her on to the fulfillment of its own tendencies, irrespective of the disaster which consequently befell her. The novelist asks, "Why did this blind power assert itself against an innocent, helpless individual?" "Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, sensitive as gossamer, and practically blank as snow as yet, there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; why so often the coarse appropriates the finer thus, many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain to our sense of order. One may, indeed, admit the possibility of a retribution lurking in the catastrophe. Doubtless some of Tess D'Urberville's mailed ancestors rollicking home from a fray had dealt the same wrong even more ruthlessly upon peasant girls of their time. But though to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children may be a morality good enough for divinities, it is scorned by average

1 Ibid., p. 80.

human nature; and it therefore does not mend the matter."¹

Thus Tess, with a dreadful stain upon her soul, wandered back to her old home. Fate had played into Alec's hand, and she tried to explain the dark deed by placing a strong charge against her home environment and her mother's neglect to warn her before she left, of the dangers lurking along life's pathway. "O mother, my mother!" cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break. 'How could I be expected to know? I was a child when I left this house four months ago. Why didn't you tell me there was danger in men-folk? Why didn't you warn me? Ladies know what to fend hands against, because they read novels that tell them of these tricks; but I never had the chance o' learning in that way, and you did not help me!'"² To this query the mother replied, "'Well, we must make the best of it, I suppose. Tis nater, after all, and what do please God.'"³ This reply seems to be the author's solution of the problem also.

As Tess stood among the voices of the woodland she thought she heard them whisper shame and condemnation upon her. "Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant-laden bough she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt

1 Ibid., p. 80.

2 Ibid., p. 90.

3 Ibid., p. 90.

intruding into the haunts of Innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism, she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly."¹

When her baby died the novelist remarks, "So passed away Sorrow--the Undesired--that intrusive creature, that bastard gift of shameless Nature who respects not the civil law."² Here Mr. Hardy begins his war against the environment of social conventions. He asserts that "what had bowed her head so profoundly was the thought of the world's concern at her situation."³ He remarks that "alone in a desert island she would not have been wretched at what had happened to her."⁴ "Most of the misery had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations."⁵ "But for the world's opinion those experiences would have been simply a liberal education."⁶ Here indeed the novelist shows a possible compensation. To have learnt something more of the deep meaning, the evil secrets, of life--even though it be the darker meaning, the evil secrets--is worth almost

1 Ibid., p. 94.

2 Ibid., p. 106.

3 Ibid., p. 100.

4 Ibid., p. 101.

5 Ibid., p. 101.

6 Ibid., p. 110.

any sacrifice. Thus he asks, "Was once lost always lost really true of chastity?"¹ And as social conventions and all Nature with one accord exclaim, "Yes alas!" Mr. Hardy answers cogently enough, "The recuperative power which pervaded organic nature was surely not denied to maidenhood alone."² He shows this power beginning to make itself felt in Tess, unexpected youth, surging up anew after its temporary check, and bringing with it hope, and the invincible instinct towards self delight."³

Thus Tess with all the hopes and ambitions of youth, raised herself against the hindrances nature had placed upon her and once more went forth to seek her livelihood. In her new abode at the dairy farm, nature at first seemed to smile pleasantly upon her; "either the change in the quality of the air from heavy to light, or the sense of being amid new scenes where there were no invidious eyes upon her, sent up her spirits wonderfully. Her hopes mingled with the sunshine in an ideal photosphere which surrounded her as she bounded along against the soft south wind. She heard a pleasant voice in every breeze, and in every bird's note seemed to lurk with a joy."⁴ The irresistible, universal, automatic tendency to find enjoyment, which pervades all life,

1 Ibid., p. 110.

2 Ibid., p. 110.

3 Ibid., p. 114.

4 Ibid., p. 114.

from the meanest to the highest, had at length mastered her, no longer counteracted by external pressures. Being even now only a young and immature woman, one who mentally and sentimentally had not finished growing, it was impossible that any event should have left upon Tess an impression that was not at least capable of transmutation."¹ Here she met Angel Clare. When he observed Tess he exclaimed, "What a fresh and virgin daughter of Nature that milk-maid is!"² Tess was always conscious of the power of nature. One time during their courtship she said to Angel, "The trees have inquisitive eyes, haven't they?--that is, seem as if they have. And the river says, 'Why do ye trouble me with your looks?' And you seem to see numbers of tomorrows just all in a line, the first of 'em biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller and smaller as they stand farther away but they all seem very fierce and cruel and as if they said 'I'm coming. Beware o' me! Beware o' me!'. . . . 'But you, sir--you,' she exclaimed, with almost bitter envy; 'you can raise up dreams with your music and drive all such horrid fancies away!'"³ In the happiness of dairy life, time moved rapidly on and "July passed over their heads, and the Thermidosean weather which came in its wake seemed an effort on the part of Nature to match the

1 Ibid., p. 115.

2 Ibid., p. 135.

3 Ibid., p. 139.

state of hearts at Talbothays Dairy. The air of the place, so fresh in the spring and early summer, was stagnant and enervating now. Its heavy scents weighed upon them, and at midday the landscape seemed lying in a swoon. Ethiopic scorchings browned the upper slopes of the pastures, but there was still bright green herbage here where the water-courses purled. And as Clare was oppressed by the outward heats, so was he burdened inwardly by a waxing fervor of passion for the soft and silent Tess."¹ Tess also loved Angel but she felt her past would always keep them apart. Little by little nature asserted itself and made her unable to resist him. "In reality she was drifting in acquiescence. Every see-saw of her breath, every wave of her blood, every pulse singing in her ears, was a voice that joined with Nature in revolt against her scrupulousness. Reckless, inconsiderate acceptance of him; to close with him at the altar, revealing nothing, and chancing discovery at that first act in her drama; to snatch ripe pleasure before the iron teeth of pain could have time to shut upon her; that was what love counselled; and in almost a terror of ecstasy Tess confusedly divined that, despite the many months of lonely self-chastisement, wrestlings, communings, schemes to lead a future of austere isolation, love's counsel would prevail. After they became engaged Tess made a

¹ Ibid., p. 164.

brave effort to tell Angel of her past. She wrote a letter and slipped it under his door but circumstances planned that he should not know her past until it was too late, and consequently the letter went under the rug and Angel failed to see it.

Just as they started on their small bridal trip, nature gave a hint of the fate she had planned for this helpless individual. A cock crew. "'I don't like to hear him!' said Tess to her husband. 'Tell the man to drive on.'"¹ In the old D'Urberville mansion Tess told the sin of her past episode with Alec D'Urberville. He was amazed, dumbfounded. "The night came in, and took up its place there; unconcerned and indifferent; the night which had already swallowed up his happiness, and was now digesting it listlessly; and was ready to swallow up the happiness of a thousand other people with as little disturbance or change of mien."² As they sat before the fire "Tess looked absolutely pure. Nature in her fantastic trickery had set such a seal of girlishness upon Tess's countenance that he gazed at her with a stupefied air. Through the slyness of Dame Nature, Tess had been hoodwinked by her love for Clare into forgetting that it might result in vitalizations that would inflict upon others what she had bewailed as a misfortune to herself."³ Thus

1 Ibid., p. 245.

2 Ibid., p. 268.

3 Ibid., p. 278.

Clare, himself no more virgin than Tess and in temperament lewd where she was chaste, left her. Mr. Hardy here remarks, "When two people are once parted--have abandoned a common domicile and a common environment--new growths insensibly bud upward to fill each vacated place; unforeseen accidents hinder intentions, and old plans are forgotten."¹ Later, after a brave fight against poverty and other evils of her surroundings, Tess was forced by the needs of her family, into the protection of Alec D'Urberville. Angel returned to her, and in order to be free to join her husband, Tess murdered her protector. After a brief, happy concealment with Clare in an empty house in the New Forest, she was arrested, tried and hanged.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is the story of a lonely nature tortured by the action of natural circumstances. "The gist of the story is the study of a woman with a passion for purity placed amid circumstances which compelled the defilement of her body and the starving of her spirit. True she was weak in everything but her power of loving and enduring, but her strength in loving was the secret of her weakness. The quick and rough judgment of society placed in her own bosom, and acting upon her through other people wasted her youth, her beauty, her motherhood, her love, her power of enjoying and of spreading joy, and drove her to misery, crime, and a cruel, violent death."²

1 Ibid., p. 280.

2 Child, Thomas Hardy, p. 70.

"Justice was done and the President of the Immortals had ended his sport with Tess."¹ There are few who will doubt the great injustice of the social justice which murdered Tess after perverting her; but the President of the Immortals and his "sport" do not seem to fit in with Thomas Hardy's conception of the government by nature of this world. Tess stood in isolated weakness amid her heredity and environment and the happenings of nature which were outside and beyond her control. She had a will and a conscience that could be called her own, but standing against her were father, mother, Alec, Angel, a conventional society, hereditary tendencies and a malicious course of events. All nature forced her from the right path and brought her to degradation and shame. As Professor Sherman says, "Mr. Hardy's grim symbol of nature and the morality of society is Tess of the D'Urbervilles swinging on the gallows."²

Jude the Obscure was published in 1895. On its appearance the book caused a storm of protest. It has been greatly controverted; it has been ridiculed; it has been regarded as an unfortunate blunder on the part of a once-great artist; it has also been designated as "one of the most illustrious things in literature." One critic classed the author with Grant Allen

1 Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 457.

2 Contemporary Literature, p. 167.

as a member of the "anti-marriage league"; within the last two years a writer of the history of the English novel has called attention to the "Hardy-Caine" school of fiction. The greatest and only permanent harm that this attack did was that, as Mr. Hardy has definitely stated, the experience completely took away any further interest in novel-writing.

The story is a conflict between love and morality. It is more terrible and less beautiful than Tess of the D'Urbervilles. It hurts more and inspires less; it stirs up indignation without giving the least ray of hope. As in the preceding novel, all nature planned to bring a helpless individual to destruction.

In the opening paragraphs the novelist describes his hero as a boy who "could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or topped, from a fancy that it hurt them; and late pruning when the sap was up and the tree bled profusely, had been a positive grief to him in his infancy. This weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the sort of man who was born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him."¹ "Nature's logic was too horrid for him to care for."² His mind was far above his station, and his passions kept him from rising to the level of his mind. He was eager for learning and "whenever he

1 Jude the Obscure, p. 12.

2 Ibid., p. 14.

could get away from the confines of the hamlet for an hour or two, which was not often, he would steal off to the Brown House on the hill and strain his eyes persistently"¹ hoping he might catch a glimpse of the wonderful university where he longed to go. When he did rise above his surroundings and reached the city where opportunities awaited him Nature asserted itself against him and "a compelling arm of extraordinary muscular power seized hold of him--something which had nothing in common with the spirits and influences that had moved him hitherto. This seemed to care little for his reason and his will, nothing for his so-called elevated intentions, and moved him along, as a violent school-master a school-boy he had seized by the collar, in a direction which tended towards the embrace of a woman for whom he had no respect, and whose life had nothing in common with his own except locality".² His surroundings and the constant association with a gross village girl entrapped him into a marriage which compelled him to be a stone-mason instead of a student. Jude said to Arabella, "Of course I never dreamed six months ago, or even three, of marrying. It is a complete smashing up of my plans--I mean my plans before I knew you, my dear. But what are they, after all! Dreams

1 Ibid., p. 19.

2 Ibid., p. 45.

about books, and degrees, and impossible scholarships, and all that. Certainly we'll marry; we must!"¹ He was soon deserted by his degrading Arabella. In his effort to rise once more he became despondent several times. He tried to drown himself but nature had planned that he suffer longer before the curtain fell upon his unnecessary life. "Jude put one foot on the edge of the ice, and then the other; it cracked under his weight; but this did not deter him. When just about the middle he looked around him and gave a jump. The cracking repeated itself; but he did not go down. Jude went back to the edge, and stepped upon the ground.

"It was curious, he thought. What was he reserved for? He supposed he was not a sufficiently dignified person for suicide. Peaceful death abhorred him as a subject, and would not take him."² Then he determined he would be a theologian and a priest. He went back to the city and even the lights seemed to look upon him with eyes of reproach. "They winked their lights at him dubiously and as if, though they had been awaiting him all these years, in disappointment at his tarrying, they did not much want him now."³ But he fell in love with his cousin, Sue Bridehead, and she thwarted his purpose. "Surrounded by her influence

1 Ibid., p. 62.

2 Ibid., p. 79.

3 Ibid., p. 89.

all day, walking past the spots she frequented he was always thinking of her, and was obliged to own to himself that his conscience was likely to be the loser in this battle." Soon Sue left him as Arabella had done and "he projected his mind into the future, and saw her with children more or less in her own likeness around her. But the consolation of regarding them as continuation of her identity was denied to him, as to all such dreamers, by the wilfulness of Nature in not allowing issue from one parent alone..... And then he again uneasily saw, as he had latterly seen with more and more frequency, the scorn of Nature for man's finer emotions, and her lack of interest in his aspirations."¹

As in the novels of the first period Mr. Hardy shows the power of nature in affecting an individual's mood. "The trees overhead deepened the gloom of the hour, and they dripped sadly upon him, impressing him with forebodings--illogical forebodings, for though he knew that he loved her, he also knew that he could not be more to her than he was."² "Vague imaginings of Drayton Castle, its three mints, its magnificent aspideal abbey, the chief glory of South Wessex, its twelve churches, its shrines, chantries, hospitals, its gabled freestone mansions--all now ruthlessly swept away--throw the visitor, even against his will,

1 Ibid., p. 208.

2 Ibid., p. 126.

into a pensive melancholy, which the stimulating atmosphere and limitless landscape around him can scarcely dispel."¹ Again the power is seen in a letter from Sue to Jude. "Don't come next week. On your own account don't. We were too free, under the influence of that morbid hymn and the twilight."²

As Wildeve in The Return of the Native, Jude cared for the remote and disliked the near. "Let me get Christminster and the rest is but a matter of time and energy,"³ Jude repeated. But when he arrived there he found that circumstances forced him from the right path. Through this account of his tragic history Jude made some very impressive statements showing nature's power in moulding lives. "People go on marrying because they can't resist natural forces, although many of them may know perfectly well that they are possibly buying a month's pleasure with a life's discomfort."⁴ "Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; and we can't get out of it if we would."⁵ This remark of Jude's explains the tragedy of his life.

Thus Jude the Obscure is "a tragedy of unrealized aims". Jude came of tainted stock, he was of low birth and narrow cir-

1 Ibid., p. 235.

2 Ibid., p. 245.

3 Ibid., p. 134.

4 Ibid., p. 336.

5 Ibid., p. 377.

cumstances. Yet he constantly strived to advance, and was inevitably thrown back by the entanglements of the social law with which nature brought him into conflict. Natural environment affected his character and from the beginning of the book we see nature had planned to bring this helpless individual to degradation and shame. Jude the Obscure is the only one of Thomas Hardy's books through which there shines no hope at all. The darkness is utterly unrelieved. There is no cleansing of the passions, no sense of "calm of mind, all passions spent"; but a hopeless outlook upon this life in which nature reigns supreme.

In the novels of the second period the idea of environment was a natural surrounding, changeless, heedless, which crushed its greatest enemy civilization with an austere oppression. But in Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure not only natural surroundings but all nature was in conspiracy against the individual. Even the social order aligned itself with nature in the struggle of man with his environment. In Tess of the D'Urbervilles the author shows a lonely nature tortured by circumstances working through the stupidity of man himself. Although she "strayed from the path" when a very young girl, Tess might have lived a peaceful and beneficent life, had it not been for the sense of sin implanted in her by the collective timidity of society and for the environment of conventions which proclaimed her an outcast. In Jude the Obscure Mr. Hardy likewise shows the tyranny which arises from the social mould of civilization

and "the strictness and fatal blindness of the world and its ways" which sweeps all men into the same uniform current where none are at liberty. He brings definite charges against the quick judgment of society, which in its effort to protect itself destroys some of its most sensitive and finest material. "Who was to blame?" Sue is asked, and she replies, "I don't know. The Universe, I suppose, things in general, because they are so horrid and cruel!" The cruelty is not in the individual but in "things in general," in the scheme of modern society, in an environment of hard and fast ideas, in the uncontrollable powers of nature which direct our lives, austere and tyrannically. Mr. Hardy asks us after he has shown us Tess and Jude, tortured victims of heredity and environment, "Is this the gentle mercy of your nature and your nature's God?" "Did this being come 'trailing clouds of glory' from your all loving Father?" The bitterness of the question lies in the fact that as we look around us at the wrecks of humanity--wrecks innocent of their own destruction--we are unable to answer him.

CONCLUSION.

In summing up the idea of environment in Thomas Hardy's novels, we see that environment has an important place in all the novels discussed. In the novels of the first period the author shows environment affecting the character and actions of an individual in an incidental way. He does not show it as a force which definitely and permanently moulds characters and forms destinies--as a force which determines the outcome of the story.

In the novels of the second period the idea of environment becomes stronger. The novelist shows environment as an active personal force, a sensuous surrounding which is antagonistic to man and is conspiring to bring helpless individuals to destruction. Those who submit to the force of their environment, are inevitably shaped and cramped by it; those who revolt and battle against it are shattered by its relentless, heedless oppression. In this period environment determines the outcome of the story.

In the novels of the third period the idea of environment becomes even stronger. Not only a sensuous surrounding but all nature joined by the social order unites in a deep conspiracy to bring weak individuals to degradation and shame. Mr. Hardy shows Tess and Jude as persons born to misery, and the tragedy

of it for him is that they are not to blame for their surroundings. It is the circumstances which are all wrong. He believes that the whole social order is not only inadequate for the production of happiness, but designed as if by diabolical skill to make us all miserable. The author sees the individual as a hoop, carried on by the force of existence in an unceasing series of revolutions. The direction of each revolution is determined by the nature of the place struck in its preceding contact with the earth. If the hoop goes on a smooth surface, man's existence will be in a smooth direct path. If it chances to strike rocks and snags in its course, likewise the whole direction of man's life will be determined by the external forces he encounters along the way. Nature has no "holy plan". To use another very similar simile, man is as clay in the hands of his great potter; and the potter, to Thomas Hardy, is environment.

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